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DOCUMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICES ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

Introduction

CMHC has documented a cross-section of ten "best practices" projects that have effectively addressed the needs of homeless people and those "at risk" of homelessness. These projects represent a broad range of responses to homelessness and illustrate the diversity of the homeless population throughout the country.

Several criteria were developed to determine which projects to document. It was important that projects demonstrate that homeless persons were involved in developing solutions, that they were empowered to actively pursue the goal of independence, and that safety and security was offered, especially to vulnerable groups such as women, children and youth. Other factors were deemed to be important in denoting effective practices such as:

- the integration of front line service providers in the development of solutions;
- a multidimensional approach to meeting needs;
- the variety of services to respond to sub-populations.

Six projects were fully documented providing an executive summary, fact sheet, project history, client profile, management and financial profile, and a description of the overall philosophy and approach for each one. Four projects were also documented similarly but in a more condensed form.

The Approaches

The response to homelessness, as illustrated by the documented projects, is as diverse as the population served. In Calgary, the *Community Action Plan* not only addressed the needs of the homeless population but also integrated them in a tangible way through the *Street Speaks* component of the plan. *Rossbrook House* offers children at risk an alternative to the street. Other projects such as *Lookout Emergency Aid Society* and *Phoenix Youth Programs* have developed a range of services that encompass outreach and emergency shelters, as well as transitional and permanent housing. Both *StreetCity* and *Sandy Merriman House* incorporated homeless persons in the

development stage of the project, providing an opportunity for them to develop employment skills and participate in designing suitable housing.

The complexity of homelessness issues requires that a broad spectrum of services be offered. At *Centre 454*, the services include laundry and shower facilities, counselling, referrals, and assistance in résumé writing. For the *Fédération des O.S.B.L. d'habitation de Montréal (FOHM)*, support services are seen as an integral part of permanent housing. In other projects such as *Centre Jacques-Cartier* and the *Native Women's Transition Centre*, residents, with support from staff, identify their own needs and a program is jointly developed.

The Best Practices (from west to east)

Sandy Merriman House (SMH), Victoria, British Columbia

Sandy Merriman House was created as a result of an initiative called the *Downtown Women's Project*. The intended clients of the SMH were involved in the construction phase of the project under a program designed to train long-term unemployed women in basic carpentry. While gaining marketable skills, the participants worked on their own personal development as steps toward reintegrating into the work force. Sandy Merriman House offers overnight shelter from 7:00 p.m. to 10:30 a.m. and a daily Drop-In program from 11:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Both programs provide safe, comfortable, and welcoming environments; meals; laundry and shower facilities; one-to-one support; and referrals to community agencies and support groups. In 1998, the SMH Drop-In program served 1,090



women, including 777 women not using the shelter. Many clients are homeless, dealing with serious and persistent mental illness, and many of them work in the sex trade.

Lookout Emergency Aid Society, Vancouver, British Columbia

Lookout Emergency Aid Society is a non-profit charitable agency that offers a 24-hour 7 day a week service for adult men and women who are destitute and require assistance. The men and women who use its services suffer from a wide variety of problems including mental illness, chronic alcoholism, drug addiction, mental or physical disabilities, and chronic health problems, including HIV/AIDS. The Society offers its services from a number of sites in Vancouver, which include a minimal barrier Emergency Centre; a Tenancy Program providing transitional housing; Jeffrey Ross and Jim Green Residences, offering permanent independent housing; "partnership" units with private sector landlords; the Living Room Drop-in/Activity Centre; an Outreach Program that provides intensive off-site short-term case management and planning services; and Marpole emergency shelter.

Community Action Plan: Reducing Homelessness in Calgary, Alberta

In Calgary, the Community Action Plan: Reducing Homelessness in Calgary, was the culmination of a two-year process of consultation and research that not only encouraged active participation on the part of homeless and formerly homeless individuals in focus groups and surveys, but had them play a role as writers and researchers (*The Street Speaks*), group facilitators, and Ad Hoc Steering Committee members. As a concrete result of this initiative, the City of Calgary committed \$1.4 million to affordable housing and the creation of additional emergency and transitional beds. In addition, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, a fundraising body made up of influential Calgarians, was established.

The Native Women's Transition Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba

The Native Women's Transition Centre (NWTC) is a long-term

"Because of the ongoing support I have, I am able to live a sober and drug-free lifestyle and provide a safe home for my children. My children know they are safe in their home and that I can finally provide stability for them."

residence that provides care for up to 21 Aboriginal women and children who are struggling to make life changes. Its second stage housing facility, Memengwaa Place, is an independent living program for Aboriginal victims of family violence and residents of NWTC wanting to make the transition back into the community. It provides seven full suites, an on-site support worker and security features. The women who come to the Centre set the goals they want to achieve and the Centre provides the support needed.

There are group programs on family violence, parenting and child development; self-esteem and assertiveness training; as well as abuse and addictions sessions. The Centre also has a traditional sharing circle and access to traditional Aboriginal teachers and healers.

Rossbrook House, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Rossbrook House, located in a renovated church, is open for children and youth (95 percent of whom are Aboriginal) every day of the year from 7:30 a.m. to midnight. On weekends and school holidays it operates 24 hours a day. The building includes a kitchen, weight room, pool tables, and areas for board games and television. Participants may sleep on the various benches throughout the building, and at the close of each evening, the staff drives them home to ensure they have a safe place to stay at night. Virtually every senior staff member has "grown up" at Rossbrook and has learned leadership skills there.

StreetCity, Toronto, Ontario

StreetCity is both the name of a project developed in 1990 in downtown Toronto and a concept that is now embodied in that project and in a second one called Strachan House, located in Toronto's downtown west end. Both projects were built within the shell of existing warehouse type buildings and are modelled on the rooming house concept. The original plan for StreetCity was to provide a temporary solution, until more permanent housing could be developed. Over time, it became clear that StreetCity was necessary, both for individuals who stay for the long term and for the continued flow of people

"While Jack (not his real name) continues to drink heavily, his health is much improved and he has a strong sense of belonging to the community. Staff and other residents care about him and watch out for him. On occasions when he has attacks, they call for an ambulance or take him to the hospital themselves."

on the street, for whom this form of housing can be a crucial first step to obtain other forms of housing. Future residents were actively involved in the physical and social design of their new homes. Residents continue to participate in decision-making and ongoing management.

Centre 454, Ottawa, Ontario

The Anglican Social Services Centre was established in 1954, when the Council for Social Service of the Anglican Diocese sent members of the Church Army to visit Anglican people in the courts and jails in the Ottawa area. Over the years, the work being done and the people being served diversified. Centre 454 is now one of seven day programs funded by the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. It is open Monday through Friday and provides concrete social recreational programming and counselling to clients. Card tournaments,

bingos, movies and community meetings allow the clients to interact with others and to develop their social skills. Counselling and referrals are available for a variety of issues--health, HIV/AIDS, addictions, education, housing, employment and other personal matters--which may interfere with the choices available to clients.

Fédération des organismes sans but lucratif d'habitation de Montréal (O.S.B.L.), Montréal, Québec

The *Fédération des O.S.B.L. d'habitation de Montréal* (FOHM), created in 1987, is a federation comprising 39 non-profit housing organisations, representing almost 2,000 units. It also directly manages close to 200 units (in six buildings) for the Montréal public housing agency. It is primarily here that the FOHM offers community support services to tenants to ensure their residential stability and improve their quality of life. Residents come from the street, hostels, shelters, temporary housing, and hospitals. Besides economic difficulties, tenants are confronted by a multitude of problems including alcoholism, drug addiction, mental health problems, and HIV/AIDS. Residents are encouraged to become involved in the management of their own housing by participating in the selection of new tenants and on the Board of Directors.

Centre Jacques-Cartier, Québec, Québec

Centre Jacques-Cartier's mandate is to support the social, scholastic and professional integration of young adults, 16-30 years old. Incorporated in 1992, the Centre was a response to the lack of affordable housing for youth and the conviction of founding members that housing without suitable support services would not be sufficient for this group. Each year, about 35 people are housed in the 27 permanent units in the project and up to 500 young people use the services, which include support in making a "life plan". Three programs are an integral part of *Centre Jacques-Cartier*. The *Ateliers à la Terre* is an experimental community farm. The *Tam Tam Café* is a modestly priced restaurant that is also a cultural centre, offering exposition space, poetry recitals, music and discussion groups. The *Atelier du Pouce Vert* produces and markets outdoor and gardening products made of wood.

Phoenix Youth Programs, Halifax, Nova Scotia

In 1987, Phoenix House opened as a long-term facility for

homeless youth. Since that time, three additional projects were developed under Phoenix Youth Programs: the Supervised Apartment Program, an independent living option; the Follow-Up Program, to provide ongoing support to clients after leaving the residential programs; and the Phoenix Centre for Youth, a drop-in facility offering day services and advocacy for youth in need. The philosophy of the organisation is to recognize that adult homelessness is a cycle that often begins in adolescence and can lead to a lifelong dependence on social assistance. Phoenix Youth Programs believes that, through validating the experience of youth, valuing the worth, dignity and potential of every human being, and having access to resources, young people who have been marginalised can feel that their efforts to improve their lives can be realised.

"A lot of youth come here with many different problems and, like me, are very scared to ask for help. When you have no place to lay your head at night and no food in your stomach, you really ask yourself, 'Is there somewhere better I can go?'"

Project Manager: Anna Lenk

Research Report: Documentation of Best Practices
Addressing Homelessness.

Research Consultant: Luba Serge

A full report on this project is available from the Canadian
Housing Information Centre at the address below.

Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the National Housing Act, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

This fact sheet is one of a series intended to inform you of the nature and scope of CMHC's research report.

The **Research Highlights** fact sheet is one of a wide variety of housing related publications produced by CMHC.

For a complete list of **Research Highlights**, or for more information on CMHC housing research and information, please contact:

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